

Western University

Scholarship@Western

Meeting Notes

Consortium on Electoral Democracy (C-Dem)
Collections.

2-22-2021

C-Dem Advisory Council Meeting Notes February 22, 2021

Consortium on Electoral Democracy

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cdemnotes>



Part of the [Political Science Commons](#)

Citation of this paper:

Consortium on Electoral Democracy, "C-Dem Advisory Council Meeting Notes February 22, 2021" (2021).
Meeting Notes. 2.

<https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/cdemnotes/2>

ADVISORY COUNCIL VIRTUAL MEETING
Monday, February 22, 2021, 3:00 – 4:00 pm EST

NOTES

Participants

André Blais, Professor, University Research Chair in Electoral Studies, Département de science politique, Université de Montréal
Allison Harell, C-Dem Co-Director, Professor, Département de science politique, Université du Québec à Montréal
Daniel Rubenson, C-Dem Executive Committee, Professor, Department of Politics, Ryerson University
Elizabeth Gidengil, Professor, Department of Political Science, McGill University
Elizabeth Zechmeister, Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Political Science, Vanderbilt University
Keith Archer, Elections Consultant; Former Chief Electoral Officer of British Columbia
John Aldrich, Pfizer-Pratt University Professor of Political Science, Duke University
Laura Stephenson, C-Dem Co-Director, Professor, Department of Political Science, Western University
Patrick Fournier, Professor, Département de science politique, Université de Montréal
Peter Loewen, C-Dem Executive Committee, Professor, Department of Political Science, University of Toronto
Richard Johnston, Professor Emeritus, Canada Research Chair in Public Opinion, Elections & Representation (retired 2020), University of British Columbia
Stuart Soroka, Research Professor, Center for Political Studies, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan

Regrets

Leonie Huddy, Professor, Department of Political Science, State University of New York at Stony Brook
Shanto Iyengar, Professor of Political Science; Director, Political Communications Laboratory, Stanford University

Supporting Documentation

(a) Agenda

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/n8qj19tjd0q6bj0/2021%20Advisory%20Council%20Meeting%20Agenda%20February%2022%2C%202021.pdf?dl=0>

(b) C-Dem Advisory Council Report, February 16, 2021

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ekutebhoy276f8m/Feb%2016%202021%20Advisory%20Council%20Report.pdf?dl=0>

(c) C-Dem Advisory Council Meeting PowerPoint Presentation

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/7t8ffaj841qcit2/C-Dem%20for%20Advisory%20Council.pptx?dl=0>

Agenda item # 1: Update on the C-Dem network

(a) New researchers

Matthew Lebo, Professor and Chair of the Department of Political Science, Western University, has joined the Academic Network as a collaborator. Matt is very interested in working with the C-Dem network to encourage students in underrepresented groups to study political behaviour and take part in C-Dem activities.

Although not officially, *Holly Ann Garnett*, Assistant Professor, Royal Military College, has joined the network as the representative of the Institute of Intergovernmental Relations (Queen's University). Holly Ann has recently taken over as the Director of the Electoral Integrity Project (EIP). C-Dem will explore opportunities for collaboration with the EIP this year.

(b) New partners

Three new partners joined the C-Dem network in the past year:

- *Elections New Brunswick* (www.electionsnb.ca); C-Dem worked with Elections New Brunswick to field questions on the provincial election study and provided a report of the results.
- *Glocal Foundation of Canada* (www.glocalfoundation.ca); a small organization which runs www.youcount.ca, a website that provides information about representatives and electoral candidates to people across Canada; GLOCAL will assist in spreading the word about C-Dem's research findings and help to collate and synthesize political information for Canadians.
- *Latin American Public Opinion Project Lab* (www.vanderbilt.edu/lapop) which runs the AmericasBarometer and is at the forefront of survey design and implementation in less-developed countries.

(c) New personnel

i. Postdoctoral Fellows

Amber Hye-Yon Lee joined the C-Dem network in January as a postdoctoral fellow at Ryerson University. *Joanie Bouchard*, postdoctoral fellow at Western University, and *Laura French Bourgeois*, postdoctoral fellow at UQAM, complete their two-year terms this year. C-Dem will start the search for their replacements in the spring.

ii. Data Collection Research Assistant

C-Dem is in the process of hiring a full-time research assistant to assist the co-directors with the specific tasks associated with coordinating, programming, and fielding surveys. This person will also be responsible for cleaning and preparing datasets for distribution as well as preparing codebooks.

Agenda item #2: Feedback on questions regarding data collection

(a) Should C-Dem include a phone component in the next Canadian Election Study (CES), and if this is advised:

- i. What revisions are required of the phone component to be part of the CSES?**
- ii. How much of the resources should be invested in some form of phone survey?**
- iii. Can the phone component be used as a benchmarking tool in a short version or used as a post-only survey? The options are wide-open.**

- It was clarified that phone interviews are not required to be part of the CSES; a probability sample is required.
- The expensive component of doing phone surveys is recruiting respondents, the additional cost of having them complete the survey is marginal.
- C-Dem received a quote from Leger (a quality firm which has built its reputation on phone surveys) of between \$50,000 to \$60,000 for a 15-minute post-election phone survey of 1,500 people to run the CSES module; the quote did not include multiple call backs; this addition would increase the quote by at least 50%; the value of this investment is questionable.
- C-Dem does have the funds to conduct a phone survey yet contracting with a company that can provide a high-quality phone survey in Canada is a challenge.
- The format of questions to use needs to be considered; the American National Election Study is dealing with the issue that the use of phone will have a different set of mode effects which limits the instrumentation that can be used, e.g., it is hard to fit a 100-point scale.
- An option is to have a person give the questionnaire live online to the respondent which can lead much more quickly to a phone-based interview; makes it easier to get a probability sample and is cheaper than an in-person home interview.
- Including a phone component is difficult to reconcile with the objective of the CES online component which is mass; 40,000 interviews in the last CES, an achievement which really pushed the capacity of the Canadian online interviewing system.
- Most of C-Dem's analysis so far has been comparing the phone and online samples and reproducing research that Cutler and colleagues have done; the challenge in answering this question is that the phone response was quite low.
- One key question is: Does reproducing previous phone and online surveys in a shorter format result in higher quality data?
- The analysis included comparing the quality of the data from the CSES module in both formats; no clear patterns were found; further analysis has been hampered by the lack of person-power and the time constraints created by the unexpected number of provincial elections this fall (four were surveyed, only one was anticipated).
- Elections Saskatchewan conducted a post-election phone survey (2,400 respondents)

- C-Dem only collected online data during the Saskatchewan election and in the other three election studies, British Columbia (BC), New Brunswick (NB), and Newfoundland and Labrador (NL).
- It was suggested that C-Dem approach the university-based Institute for Social Research (ISR) to do a phone survey during the last two weeks of the campaign (1,500 – 2,000 respondents) and a post-election survey to get a real measure of reported vote not just vote intention; even if the ISR can only get a 25% response rate instead of the 40% response rate they have achieved in the past, the ISR is much better than the commercial options out there.
- Although this suggestion would meet CSES requirements, the return on investment is questionable.
- Another suggestion was to invest C-Dem funds in research that will answer the question: What strategies are required to effectively address the decreasing response rates for phone surveys and all the other related complications of connecting with people via the phone, for example, the increasing number of households that do not have a landline and people who have multiple cell phone numbers?

(b) There is a lot of value in probability sampling. How can C-Dem do probability samplings effectively?

- An option for online probability sampling in Canada is not easy to come up with unless a phone to web recruitment process is done, which is possible.
- C-Dem was advised, during preparation for the 2019 CES, that doing a phone-to-web recruit was not cost-effective.
- Getting a probability sample to meet the requirements of the CSES does not make financial sense if there is a risk of a low response rate; the response rate for the phone survey in the 2019 CES was 5.6%.
- Surprisingly, the issue of getting a probability sample has not been raised by any of the C-Dem EMB partners.

(c) Given the competitive sampling environment in Canada, what is the optimum sample size that ensures a high-quality sample from a single company and allows for analysis of salient subgroups?

- Currently, there is a plethora of polling/online sampling within Canada (e.g., 50,000 respondents in the Elections Canada survey).
- It is hard to evaluate the impact on analytical power as sample sizes increase over 20,000, 30,000, and 40,000.
- The marginal cost of increasing the sample size supports the goal of getting as many people as possible, thus achieving a cross-sectional sample.
- Retention rate is also critical; the 2019 CES sample of almost 40,000 involved multiple providers, which, upon analysis, had very different return to sample rates; the lesson learned is that it is best to contract with a direct supplier of the sample and set hard requirements for retention of respondents from pre to post surveys.
- The limitation is that there are few providers in Canada that can do a big survey, C-Dem pushed the limits to achieve a CES sample of almost 40,000 in 2019.

- C-Dem has been able to achieve much higher return rates doing provincial studies which are on a much smaller scale, for example, Leger provided a return to sample rate of almost 70% for the post-election survey in British Columbia (Leger-only panel).
- Contracting with a single provider of a large sample for the next CES may be difficult because:
 - Contracts over \$100,000 need to go through the university finance office and triggers a public bidding process; there may not be time for this process if a snap election is called.
 - If decide to do a phone survey as well as an online, the phone survey would be a separate contract, resulting in two contracts over \$100,000.
 - Based on past experience, it is a challenge to get the online panels to bid on providing a larger sample because some companies do not want to submit a formal bid and they can still get the sale by subcontracting with the survey firm contracted to provide the large sample.
- Possible ways to avoid triggering the need for a public-bidding process are:
 - Have two contracts with a company, one for the campaign survey and one for the post-election survey.
 - Blend data-collection, e.g., purchase \$80,000 of data from Dynata and \$80,000 from Leger, if doing so is within the rules of Ontario universities.
 - Get vendors pre-approved.
 - Limit the samples to 15,000 – 20,000 which will keep the contracts under \$100,000 and allow flexibility to approach preferred companies (option suggested by C-Dem).

(d) What is the best response if a snap election is called in the next few months?

- It was suggested that an online survey of approximately 10,000 people be done in the last week of the election campaign.
- This suggestion was contingent on the availability of funding for a high-quality survey during the following election.
- C-Dem confirmed that funding is available and that an online sample of 20,000 could be conducted without compromising the quality of the next CES; the project is well within the proposed budget because:
 - In-person activities and conference travel have not occurred because of the pandemic.
 - The CES survey cost less than estimated; the revenue from the module sales covered most of the cost.
 - C-Dem has been very successful in selling modules to be included in the CES and the provincial election studies by partners and people outside of the C-Dem network.
- The argument for only doing a pre-election survey was increased confidence in people's responses about issues and leaders, as there is less rationalization; people's post-election responses are influenced by the election results.
- Another suggestion is to do both, yet limit the post-election survey to five questions, to collect data on how people voted; it was uncertain that this protocol would meet the CSES requirements.

(e) Are there plans for the data collected by the EMBs during provincial elections to be transferred to C-Dem?

- No; C-Dem would like to facilitate sharing of the data and has had discussions with Elections BC and Elections Ontario (ON), both are C-Dem partners.
- C-Dem has worked most closely with Elections ON, which has a vigorous research department.
- Elections NB had a contract with C-Dem to collect the data they needed while C-Dem was in the field during the provincial election and to provide a report of the survey results; Elections NB did not want the data.
- Elections BC added questions to C-Dem's core instrument; C-Dem gave them the raw data; Elections BC also collected their own data.
- C-Dem is discussing with Elections Canada the possibility of looking at the data they collected during the 2019 CES and doing work on this dataset as well as the data collected by C-Dem.

Agenda item #3: Feedback on C-Dem activities

The Advisory Council members did not have any suggestions regarding additional activities C-Dem should take part in or help to organize.

Agenda item #4: Feedback on research output

(a) How can C-Dem strategically use project funding to commission reports by highly skilled researchers who are really curious about finding answers to the questions raised, e.g., what is the optimal sample size, does mode matter, and how can probability sampling be done effectively?

- These questions regarding how to effectively adapt survey design and methodology are shared by researchers all over the world.
- It was suggested that C-Dem run a contest in which research teams would be invited to propose novel approaches to understanding the differences between two survey samples taken from the 2019 CES data, one from the phone survey and the other from the online survey.
- In support, it was suggested that the better question is: Is there equivalence? Answering this question informs the relative value of the two modes and will deepen understanding of when there is equivalence and when there is not.
- The idea of holding a contest was also challenged because there is existing evidence that it is not possible to fully evaluate the question.
- C-Dem has commissioned a paper that will compare the 2019 phone and web surveys.

Adjournment:

Advisory Council members were encouraged to let C-Dem know their thoughts regarding the ideas discussed and other possibilities that will assist C-Dem in successfully meeting the project goals.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:05 pm EST.